

## ELECTIONS

As in modern democracies, so in both Rome and the provincial towns elections were of key importance. At Rome there were annual elections at which the citizen body elected the magistrates, who were the executives of the whole system of government. There were four 'colleges' of magistrates, and those aspiring to high office had to hold each post in succession. The junior post was that of quaestor (treasury official); next were the aediles, who had general administrative duties; then came the praetors, who were in charge of judicial administration; and finally the two consuls, the chief executives of the state.



Roman magistrate

The magistrates held office for one year only and there was a minimum age at which candidates were allowed to stand. On becoming a quaestor, you automatically joined the senate for life, and so at the elections the people not only chose those who were to hold office for a year but also the members of the senate, who advised and in fact controlled the magistrates.

However, the system was not as democratic as it sounds since in the elective assemblies there were elaborate arrangements by which the votes of the richer citizens counted for more than those of the poor. Elections were rigged, bribery was normal, and the common people were only allowed to vote for members of the upper classes. The many conquests which were expanding the empire brought more and more slaves to Rome and they did more and more of the work. There was, therefore, an increasing number of unemployed citizens who had to be supported by subsidized or free grain. There was no good reason for voting for one candidate rather than another except for their short-term promises, and so the common people's vote tended to go to those who gave them the most grain or put on the best shows in the theatre. A Roman poet called Juvenal was to remark, with considerable truth, that the only things that interested them were 'bread and circuses' (*pānem et circēnsēs*).

In provincial towns the local government was modelled on that of Rome. The citizens of a *colōnia* met annually in assembly to elect the two magistrates (*duovirī*) who were to run their town for a year. Corresponding to the senate there was an assembly of 80–100 councillors (*decuriōnēs*) who were recruited from ex-magistrates and held office for life. Like the senate, their function was to advise the *duovirī* and in practice they ran public affairs.



Elections were lively events, hotly contested, as numerous surviving graffiti on the walls of Pompeii make clear. Two of these are included in the Latin story. Here are two more: the first shows the guild system at work in a rather comic way!

- The guild of Late Drinkers unanimously supports Marcus Cerrinius Vatia as aedile.
- Statia and Petronia ask for your support for Marcus Casellius and Lucius Albucius as aediles. I hope we have citizens like this in our colony for ever.

A letter survives in which Quintus Cicero advises his brother Marcus – who is soon to feature in our story – on how to conduct his election campaign. Here is some of what he says:

A campaign for election to a magistracy can be divided into two kinds of activity: firstly to gain the support of one's friends, secondly to win the good will of the people. The support of one's friends should be secured by kindness done and repaid, by long-standing acquaintance and by a charming and friendly nature. But the word 'friend' has a wider application in an election campaign than in the rest of life. Anyone who shows any sympathy towards you, who pays attention to you, who frequents your house, should be reckoned among your 'friends'... It is necessary to have friends of every kind: for the sake of appearance, make friends with men who are distinguished in rank and title. These, though they may not actively support the campaign, none the less confer some prestige upon the candidate... You should have knowledge of people's names, winning manners, persistence, generosity, reputation and confidence in your public program... You badly need to use flattery, which, though disgraceful in the rest of one's life, is essential while electioneering... All men naturally prefer you to lie to them than to refuse your aid... To make a promise is not definite; it allows postponement, and affects only a few people.

*Would Quintus Cicero's advice be helpful to a modern politician?*

*The word candidate is derived from the Latin word for 'white' (candidus), as candidates would make their togas especially white while running for office. Why do you think they did this?*

*Here is the full version of the poster painted on the walls of Pompeii which was quoted on page 8:*

*I beg you to elect Marcus Epidius Sabinus duovir; he is a worthy candidate; a defender of your colony, supported by the eminent judge Suedus Clemens and the unanimous voice of the town council, as worthy of our republic because of his services and his honesty. Vote for him.*

*Explain what office Sabinus hopes to win, whose support he claims to have, and what grounds he has for hoping that the electors will vote for him. Compare this poster with those put out by candidates in a modern local or national election.*